

vote against \$2,000 checks for people in your State, vote against it. I see Senator TOOMEY here. He has been clear about it. I suspect he will vote against it. I respect his opinion, but all that we are asking for is a vote. What is the problem? In the House, over two-thirds of the Members of that body, including 44 Republicans, voted to say, in this time of economic desperation, working families deserve help, and they deserve a \$2,000 check.

As Senator SCHUMER just indicated, we have a very unlikely ally in President Trump. Nobody here has disagreed with Trump more times than I have; yet here is what the leader of the Republican Party writes: “\$2000 ASAP!” So, even on this issue, amazingly enough, the President of the United States is right.

What all of this comes down to, my fellow Americans, is not even whether you agree with Senator SCHUMER and myself and 78 percent of the American people or whether you agree with Senator MCCONNELL and, I suspect, Senator TOOMEY. That is fine. It is called democracy. We have differences of opinion. All that I am asking is to give us a vote. What is the problem? Allow the U.S. Senators to cast a vote as to whether they are for the \$2,000 check or whether they are against it.

We will need, as I understand it, 60 votes to win. That is a big hurdle. I don't know that we are going to win. There are a number of Republicans, to their credit, who have said they are ready to vote for it. I suspect there may be more, when given the opportunity, who will vote for it. Maybe I am wrong. Maybe we will lose. I think that would be unfortunate. All that I am asking for right now is to give us the opportunity to vote. What is the problem with that?

I will now go to Senate legalese.

I ask unanimous consent that at 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, December 31, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 9051, a bill to provide a \$2,000 direct payment to the working class; that the bill be considered read a third time; and that the Senate vote on the passage of the bill, without intervening action or debate; further, that if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; further, that immediately following the vote on H.R. 9051, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the veto message on H.R. 6395 and that the Senate immediately vote on the passage of the bill, the objections of the President to the contrary notwithstanding, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, let me start by pointing out that we are not in the same place that we were back in March. Our economy is in nothing like the situation we faced during a moment in March when this body came

together and voted unanimously, I believe, for the most extraordinary aid package—financial stimulus bill, however you care to characterize it—in the history of the world by far. Remember where we were. We had closed down the economy. To a very large degree, the American economy had stopped functioning because State governments around the country decided they had to close it down. We can discuss and we can argue about whether that was a good decision or not, but given the limited knowledge we had about the nature of the COVID-19 threat, it was deemed to be the right thing to do.

So we were on the verge of having no economy. That has never happened before in our history.

So what did we do? We decided this calls for extraordinary measures, and we would try to use Federal dollars as a substitute for the economy—just replace lost income on a massive, unprecedented scale—and we did. We approved almost \$3 trillion in that legislation.

At the time, we included \$1,200 per person. You could make an argument that that was an extremely inefficient use of that \$1,200 per person, but at the time, given the circumstances, I understood why we didn't have many good options, and that was something we decided to do.

So where are we now? We are in a very different place. Our economy is not in a free fall. Our economy is in a recovery mode. We are not back to where we want to end up. We are not back to where we were before March, but we have taken big steps in that direction.

The economy grew at 33 percent last quarter—33 percent. That is a tremendous recovery that is underway. More than half of all the people who lost their jobs earlier this year have regained their jobs. So we are not finished yet, but that is a huge step along the way.

And now we are being told, after passing another extraordinary bill—this one almost \$1 trillion and including \$600 per person—that that is not enough; we need to do \$2,000 per person, despite the fact that we know for sure, we know for a fact, that the large majority of those checks are going to go to people who had no lost income.

How does that make any sense at all? We know for sure that the majority of these people had no lost income. They didn't lose their jobs, and yet we are going to send them not \$600, not the \$1,200, but \$2,000.

So think about this. A married couple, who both are working and have 2 kids, maybe they work for the Federal Government, like 2 million-odd people do. Maybe they work for a large company, the vast majority of which did not have large numbers of layoffs. So this two-child, two-income couple that makes six figures had no interruption, no diminishment of their income whatsoever. They are going to get \$8,000 of money we don't have that is going to be either borrowed or printed. That is what it is all going to come down to.

There are people who are still suffering from the economic fallout of this terrible COVID crisis. There is no question about it. We know there are people who are concentrated in a handful of industries, for the most part—not exclusively—but people who have worked in the restaurant industry, people who work for hotels, travel, entertainment. So many of those people are still out of work and their prospects of getting their old jobs back are not good in the short run. I sure hope they will be good in the medium-term run, if not sooner.

And our bill addressed that. It addressed that problem. How did we do that? With a new round of PPP loans, which are really grants to small businesses, if they will keep their workforce intact; expansion of unemployment insurance benefits, so that people who have historically been ineligible remain eligible so they can continue to collect unemployment benefits; an increase in the amount of unemployment benefits, a \$300-a-week overlay of Federal money on top of whatever their State program is; \$600 per person, regardless of whether they lost income.

All of that was passed just a few days ago, and now we are told we need to come back immediately, right now, and make sure that we are sending \$2,000 checks to people who had no lost income.

So for that reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 9051 AND H.R. 6395

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I rise to echo the sentiments of the Senator from Vermont. He is right. The Republicans are wrong on this issue. On every single part of this debate, Senator SANDERS is right; the Republicans are wrong.

We are in the middle of an unprecedented crisis in our country. We have a healthcare crisis, we have an unemployment crisis, we have a hunger crisis, we have a housing crisis, we have an addiction crisis, and we have a moral crisis in this country.

The U.S. Government should be responding to the needs, to the desperation of families in our country at this time. There is a crisis of faith that the American people have in its government's ability to respond to human suffering. Well, this institution has been created to respond to human suffering. That is our job.

Tony Fauci has made it very clear that the worst of the pandemic is ahead of us, not behind us. We know what is coming, and yet we are not responding. We know this is not going away soon, and yet we are not responding.

A program, Operation Warp Speed, was created to create a vaccine, but because for 7 months the Republicans have refused to fund the public health

system of our country at the State and local level, we have “Operation Snail Speed” to put the vaccinations in the arms of the American people.

It was anticipatable. Tony Fauci and others were warning us back in May and June and July that there would be a second wave and the second wave could be bigger. We got the warning. The Republicans refused to heed that warning.

And here we are now, without the public health infrastructure to deal with the overflow capacity in emergency rooms, in ICUs all across the country, while simultaneously asking those same medical institutions to put vaccinations in the arms of healthy people, without the resources provided by the Federal Government to help those States and local communities to deal with that crisis.

Sometimes Daniel Patrick Moynihan would say that when you deal with an issue you deal with it with benign neglect if you don't want to help or you don't want to hurt—deal with benign neglect.

What has happened with the Republicans this year is that they created a program which is designed neglect. It is an actual plan not to provide the funding, not to provide the help for those families, for those communities, for those institutions that are now being overwhelmed, and asked, on top of that, to put this extra burden of putting vaccinations in people's arms, but without the extra resources.

And what do they do on the Republican side? They throw out these red herrings—so many red herrings that you would need to build an aquarium in the well here of the Senate in order to deal with all of them—that gets away from the central issue: Yes or no, up or down, will you provide \$2,000 to Americans who are going to need it through what Tony Fauci is saying will be the worst part of this pandemic? Yes or no, up or down, where do they stand on this issue?

Here is what we do know. Republicans seem more focused on funding the Defense Department than they do on funding the defenseless in our country, and Americans are becoming more defenseless as each day goes by. The headlines are screaming that this panic, which is absolutely understandable and based upon fact, is sweeping our country.

There is protection that the Federal Government should be providing to these families. We hear it. They are hungry. They could be without their homes. The addiction crisis is rising. They need help in their families.

So from my perspective, we have a moment in time, and Donald Trump happens to agree with us—even though a broken clock is right twice a day. And we do agree with him. He is right. We do need this help, which we should be providing to these families.

As we watch more and more of our American loved ones fall sick and die, families are facing a new and unprece-

dent hardship. They are having to make impossible decisions as to whether to put food on the table or keep the heat on through the cold winter months, and the U.S. Government has an obligation to help working people who, through no fault of their own, are seeing all of the things that they care about, all of the success that they have worked for, and all the financial security they have earned be washed away.

And yet the Republicans want to put another “Operation Snail Speed” in place.

The damage to these families is anticipatable. We can see what is unfolding. Dr. Fauci is telling us that we are at the worst part of the pandemic and it is going to continue. So let us act in anticipation.

Louis Pasteur used to say that “chance favors the prepared mind.” That is what Dr. Tony Fauci is telling us. Let us prepare. Let us help families prepare for what is about to arrive.

Just in Massachusetts alone, 21,000 new people applied for unemployment insurance in the week before Christmas. Food banks across Massachusetts and across the country are seeing double-digit increases in demand with families who never faced food insecurity before. People are literally starving, cold, and without homes.

Meanwhile, the majority leader and Republican leadership would rather head home for the New Year and ignore the financial and health crises that are taking a toll on our families. For millions of Americans, this will be a New Year holiday where they won't know if they can put food on the table that night. Republicans are claiming that giving \$2,000 in direct cash payments to working Americans would be too expensive, that it would inflate our national deficit, that our budgets are already bloated.

I have to ask, though, where was this outrage when Republicans blew up our national deficit to give a \$1.5 trillion tax cut to billionaires and corporations? These are the crocodile tears from the right, as Americans are shedding real tears thinking about where their next meal will come from, the eviction notice on the front door, or losing healthcare in the midst of this crisis.

Americans are actually tired of being told that \$600 is “sufficient” as an amount of money as relief, as billionaires receive their tax breaks and grow their wealth by the trillions of dollars during this crisis. The rich get richer, and the rest are there left suffering. They have had enough of being told that there just isn't the money for support for the well-being of their communities when they can see tax breaks going to those companies that are actually laying off workers.

Americans are tired of being let down by their government time and time again, as Donald Trump and his Republican allies have abandoned them during this response to the pandemic.

Americans need support. They need to be able to trust their government,

and they need \$2,000 now. So that is the issue: Yes or no, up or down, on providing \$2,000 to Americans to help them make it through the worst part of this crisis.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 31, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 9051, a bill to provide a \$2,000 direct payment to the working class; that the bill be considered read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of that bill without intervening action or debate; further, that if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; and that immediately following the vote on H.R. 9051, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the veto message on H.R. 6395; that the Senate immediately vote on passage of the bill, the objections of the President to the contrary notwithstanding, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator for Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, Speaker PELOSI's second bite at the apple, just after we voted on a \$900 billion bill that has now been signed into law by the President of the United States, is not the way to send relief to the hardest hit Americans. Under this legislation, a family of five with an annual income of \$350,000 would receive a stimulus check. This is reminiscent of the Heroes Act that the House passed, which cut taxes for millionaires and billionaires. This isn't about helping the people that need it the most. This is about helping millionaires and billionaires and people who frankly have not suffered the hardships economically that others have during this pandemic. The median household in my State is \$60,000, and the Speaker wants to send taxpayer-funded assistance to folks earning nearly six times that much. Even the Washington Post editorial board agrees this is bad policy.

It doesn't differentiate between people who have been receiving a paycheck during this pandemic, such as government employees, and people who, simply by virtue of their job, have been put out of work and are not receiving any income or maybe at best unemployment compensation. The Speaker's bill isn't about targeting folks who have lost their jobs or have seen their income reduced. It is a far cry from the additional assistance President Trump requested for the hardest hit Americans. The reality is, this bill would spend roughly \$300 billion more on folks who aren't even experiencing a financial strain from the pandemic.

We need to focus on the people who have been hurt. That is what our COVID-19 relief bill, which was just recently signed into law, is designed to do, and I dare say this is not going to be the last time we visit this topic. If there is more we need to do, I am confident we will do it. But today, in this

way, is not the right way to do it. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened carefully and watched three occasions on the floor this afternoon where Senators SCHUMER, SANDERS, and MARKEY have tried to create an opportunity where the Senate would actually come together and vote, where the Senate might make a decision based on the merits of this issue, rather than to keep talking around the issue.

What is at stake is a substantial sum of money for families who are in the midst of the struggle of their lives—\$2,000—characterized a few moments ago by my friend from Texas as “Speaker PELOSI’s idea.” Well, I might remind him that it is also Donald Trump’s idea and still is. The President has told us this morning that we should move on this as quickly as possible, and although I don’t often come to the floor to agree with the President, he is right. In this instance he is clearly right.

What are we doing now? We are calling Senators back to Washington from the far reaches across the United States. This morning, I received some email and text messages from some of my colleagues hopping on airplanes at 6 a.m. on the west coast to face a vote. What is this vote all about? Well, first, it is to override the veto of the President when it comes to the Defense authorization bill. This was certainly something that was occasioned by one Senator, the junior Senator from Kentucky, who forced us into a position where that vote needed to be taken here. It could have been handled much more efficiently and to the benefit of all Members if it was scheduled for the weekend when we were assuming a new session of Congress. But he insisted, and we are returning and, frankly, putting in peril again, in the midst of a pandemic, Members of the Senate who are traveling from all the far reaches of this country to be part of this action in Washington.

But it isn’t just the junior Senator from Kentucky who is having us sit here in Washington and wait for things that could be taken care of with dispatch. It is the senior Senator from Kentucky as well. He has decided that we will not get a vote on the House measure to increase the payments to \$2,000. Make no mistake, there is only one way to bring this relief to the families of America. It is to pass the bill already enacted by the House of Representatives—a bill which received 44 Republican votes in addition to a substantial number of Democrats, with only 2 voting no. Forty-four Republican votes joined with the Democrats to call for this measure which many have been decrying on the floor here as

a class struggle or whatever their argument might be. There is no other measure, including Senator MCCONNELL’s alternative, which has any ghost of a chance to help the families in this country with this \$2,000 benefit. The only thing that will do it—the only one thing that will do it—is this bill that has already passed the House of Representatives.

The House has recessed. When they are going to return is uncertain. They certainly don’t have the time to work through the regular order of business to consider any new legislation even if we could send it in time, which I believe is very doubtful. So it is up to Senator MCCONNELL to decide right here and now, are we going to come together as a Senate this afternoon at 5 o’clock, when we are supposed to be back and voting, and get this matter done?

Bring it to the Senate for a vote. Let’s have this vote up or down, and let the Democrats and Republicans express their will on behalf of the families in this country.

I couldn’t agree more with the Senator from Massachusetts and his characterization of what families face across this country and, certainly, in my home State of Illinois.

I just wonder if any of the Republican Senators who are downplaying this economic crisis facing these families have really looked into the issue. This morning, in the Senator’s home State of Texas, they showed an early morning television show and the cars that were lining up for food banks—long lines of people waiting for food banks. They interviewed some of them in Texas who told heartbreaking stories of how they once were volunteers at this same food bank and are now dependent for a helping hand if they were going to be able to feed their families.

These are people who are not lazy at all. Misfortune has come their way, and the question is, Will we help? This is our opportunity—today. It is a measure that has passed the House of Representatives, not some theory of some legislation that might be considered tomorrow—today. Let’s have this vote today, this evening. When the Senators have returned, let’s determine whether or not this House-passed measure of \$2,000 is going to be enacted into law, since the President is clearly anxious to sign it.

That to me is the reasonable thing to do. In fact, it might even sound like the U.S. Senate is taking a vote on a timely issue after a debate. We do it so seldom around here that I think we have lost our muscle memory when it comes to this activity in the Senate. It is time to return to it.

I thank the Senator from Vermont, the Senator from Massachusetts, and, of course, the Democratic leader for bringing this issue before us this afternoon. But it shouldn’t end with our great speeches. It ought to end with an important vote for the people of this country.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, would the Senator from Illinois yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wonder if the Senator from Illinois would consider pairing their request for a \$2,000 direct payment with a liability shield provision that would guard businesses that have been operating in good faith and following the guidelines put out by public health and government institutions, and preserve a right to sue for reckless and willful disregard of the rights for others? Would the Senator consider pairing those two together?

Mr. DURBIN. I would say in response to my colleague, I know his passionate defense of the notion for immunity from liability for corporations in America. He has introduced a lengthy bill on the subject. I don’t believe that is consistent with keeping this Nation safe during a pandemic, and it certainly is not responsive to any onslaught of lawsuits.

The Senator might be interested to know that the number of medical malpractice cases filed in the name of COVID-19 since the onset of this current pandemic is slightly higher than the total number of lawsuits filed by Donald Trump in protesting the results of the November 3 election. This is not a tsunami of lawsuits.

I believe we can take reasonable measures to support and defend those corporations and companies that are making a good-faith effort to comply with public health standards and protect their employees and customers. His bill, I am afraid, goes way too far.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me concur with my friend from Illinois on the issue.

I have a question for my colleague from Texas. It is a very simple question. You have concerns about the issue of corporate liability. I get that. I happen not to agree with you. You are entitled to your opinion. You may or may not be concerned about section 230 of the 1996 Federal telecommunications bill. That is fine too. We might have a discussion about how we protect American democracy. It is a good discussion as well. But I have a strong feeling, Senator CORNYN, that in Texas, as in Vermont—you know what—people are not really talking about corporate liability. It is a good issue. It is an important issue. I don’t believe they are talking about section 230. What I think they are talking about, as the Senator from Illinois just said, is how they are going to feed their kids today. That is the issue. And what I would ask my friend from Texas is, What is your problem with allowing the Senate to vote on whether or not we are going to allow Americans, working-class people to get a \$2,000 check?

Now I gather that when that vote comes to the floor—and I hope it comes